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ABSTRACT

Because of fewer human resources, teachers in rural schools have to assume a larger responsibility for their own curriculum development than do teachers in city schools. There is a need for a curriculum specialist to get into a situation quickly, to assess the problem, and to solve the problem quickly in order to move to another problem. In rural schools, one of the most important ways of getting teachers to assume that responsibility is to teach them to become independent learners by using the student as a major source of information and guidance in curriculum development. While this is a generic principle in curriculum development, it is a principle that assumes the critical role in rural school curriculum development. Generalizations suggested by the model developed from this curriculum project include: teachers, particularly in rural school districts, need proof of the effectiveness of a curriculum development (they must see a change in student behavior or learning needs); teachers need to value the approach to curriculum development (they must decide what is best and what is effective within the context of their own classroom); and teachers need more concrete guidance initially, but they need to work towards independence in learning via learning how to learn from their students. (AH)

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A MODEL OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS

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Need for Special Approach

There is a need for a special approach to curriculum development in rural schools mainly because rural schools do not have the support systems that may be found in urban areas. Schools in urban areas ordinarily have continual support and they can often depend upon that support. In rural schools, there is the same teacher need and fewer people to do the job. Because of fewer human resources, teachers in these schools have to assume a larger responsibility for their own curriculum development than do teachers in city schools. In rural areas, there is a need for a curriculum specialist to get into a situation quickly; to assess the problem; and to solve the problem quickly in order to move to another problem.

In rural schools, one of the most important ways of getting teachers to assume that responsibility is to teach them to become independent learners by using the student as the major source of information and guidance in curriculum development. While this is a generic principle in curriculum development, it is a principle that assumes the critical role in rural school curriculum development.

Theory and Practice

It is important that teachers in rural schools learn about theory so that they can generalize practices and fill in the gaps. They need, so to speak, a generic code, an understanding of the global, to enable them to be a positive force in the developmental process. They need,

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however, to develop this through practical experiences. It is the most meaningful way to learn theory.

If the teacher is dealing with something that is practical, something that is valued, something that can be demonstrated to be effective, then the teacher will thirst for theory. They will want to know why it works. This brings one to the second step. In order to develop curriculum in rural schools, one needs to be specific about what one is doing, and one has got to develop something that actually works. It also has to be demonstrated to the teachers that it works or, even better, they have to demonstrate to themselves that it works.

Need for Assessment

There is a critical need for pre-assessment and post-assessment in this kind of situation. Pre and post-assessments are the grist for demonstrating effectiveness. It helps to specify what is going on and specificity is important here. In these schools one cannot be investigating general kinds of concepts that can be ivestigated over time at an appropriate pace. There is not enough time for that. One has to deal with specifics and find out whether the curriculum at each developmental stage works or does not work. Therefore, for curriculum development, especially in rural schools, pre-assessment and post-assessment are essential.

The Approach

As a specific example, the authors have developed an approach to curriculum development for a particular rural school in Southeast Idaho which seems to have been very effective after only four months of intervention. This curriculum presents an approach that has great potential for continuation within that school even though the curriculum specialist

has moved on. There are a number of reasons why this curriculum will continue to be used. One major reason is that the teachers know it works. They know it works because of the pre-assessment/post-assessment measures which demonstrated positive student change.

Teachers in this elementary school had requested help in the teaching of language development with particular emphasis in writing. Before the intervention began, teachers were asked to gather data by having youngsters write in response to a particular picture which teachers selected. Rather than having some sophisticated assessment technique imposed upon them, teachers developed the assessment technique themselves which was then used for student pre- and post-assessment. By developing this assessment technique on their own, it was assured that the teachers would understand the meaning of the results and its relationship to their instructional goals and objectives. The assessment rated each student sample on a 0 to 10 scale based upon a criteria established by the teachers themselves using group consensus. The curriculum specialist acted as an independent rater using the same criteria.

After the assessment, the teachers developed, under guidance and direction, a step-by-step approach for improving the writing of youngsters in that school. This approach was developed by the teachers, again under direction, but constantly in relationship to children's learning. This led the teachers to become increasingly more confident about their own abilities not only to teach the new approach, but also to develop a scope and sequence for that approach. It also led them to realize that the major guide for the curriculum development was not the teacher trainer but the students themselves.

For example, when the teacher trainer was asked, "Where do we go next?", the answer of the trainer was usually, "Where do you think you

need to go?" The discussions that followed were centered on discovering the need for reinterpretation of data already possessed or the need for more student data for guidance. Thus, teachers were made aware of the constant cyclic process that moves from assessment of needs, problems, issues, etc., to strategy development which should always lead to a data-based evaluation of outcomes of the strategy.

Acquisition of this process, through guided practice on the part of teacher trainees, has led them to greater independence from the teacher trainer. As the trainer gradually removed himself from a purely proactive role to that of a reflector of trainee thought, it was apparent that teachers had internalized the problem solving process. This acquisition of process now allows them access to a continuous process made to expand and deepen their own curriculum using their students' needs as the generator of curriculum.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the curriculum was most convincing. Pre and post-assessment analyses of student achievement scores indicated, in the judgment of the teachers and using their own criteria-referenced assessment, that students improved significantly in their writing abilities. The assessment device was not sophisticated, but the results of its use were convincing. Each teacher rated his/her own students' papers and the curriculum specialist also rated each student's writing. The inter-rater reliability was .90, meaning that judgments based on the criteria across teachers and the curriculum specialist was very high. T-test results for the 220 students are displayed in Table 1.

Groups	Number (N)	Σd	Σd^2	Standard Dev. (σ)	t Value	Probability ($p<$)
Total Group	220	481	2,035	± 4.49	7.22	.0005

Table 1
t-Test Data

The t-value indicates to the writers that student outcomes achieved would have occurred by chance in only five out of ten thousand instances.

In a follow-up survey one and one-half years after the inservice program ended, it was found that all teachers in that school had continued to expand their own curriculum by using the students as guides. Three teachers who were new to the school since the inservice stated that they were using the curriculum. This curriculum use and expansion is a strong contrast to our experiences with curriculum projects which resulted in a well-packaged product which was placed on a shelf and never used.

Independence

The guidance of the curriculum development was directed but not imposed. The curriculum specialist in this instance trained teachers to perceive their students as the true guide of the content and strategies of their program to improve their students' writing skills. Using demonstration teaching, teacher experimentation with new skills, and reflections on classroom successes and failures, teachers rapidly acquired the theory-base and the skill to carry on alone for they had success in the form of a "proven" enhancer of student skill/knowledge that worked effectively.

ADAPTABILITY OF THIS MODEL

Three major generalizations are suggested by the model developed from this curriculum project.

1. Teachers, particularly in rural school districts, need proof of the effectiveness of a curriculum development. The time and effort they expend must demonstrate student behavior change in the form of a solution to what teachers perceive as student learning needs.

2. Teachers need to value the approach to curriculum development. The authors see inherent in this statement teacher involvement from "day-one" to a simultaneous production of a usable product as their learning takes place. They must help decide what is best and what is effective within the context of their own classroom.
3. They need more concrete guidance initially, but they need to work towards independence in learning. They need to learn how to learn from students, particularly from their own students. And they need to be guided by a process whereby the teacher trainer removes himself from the process and is assured that the trainees can assume guidance for future development.

Teachers need to learn to look less to the teacher trainer for guidance and more towards the students. The teachers need to be confident enough to learn how to extend their skills so that, eventually, they will look towards themselves and their relationship to their students for furthering the development of their skills in teaching and in durriculum development.